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ABSTRACT

The rural Warren County (Tennessee) School System created an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program in 1987 to meet the needs of Japanese and Hispanic students. The program reflects a "total approach" that involves students, parents, teachers, and community members interacting with the ESOL staff to meet student and family needs. During the regular school day, students attend pull-out ESOL classes, and the ESOL staff works with regular classroom teachers to assist students. Services provided outside regular school hours include survival English classes for new arrivals, individual school orientations, after-school tutorials and language development classes, a home intervention program, parent meetings, a 2-week summer program, and acculturation classes. The ESOL program director coordinates speakers and materials for teachers, civic organizations, and community groups. Some parents have gone into the classroom to share aspects of their culture or language. The program has also sponsored Japanese events for schools and the community to increase knowledge and understanding. Japanese industries in the area contribute to efforts of the school and community by sending educators to Japan; supporting and backing a Sister City Program, including a student exchange; and supporting ESOL activities. (KS)

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ESOL: A CHALLENGE FOR RURAL SCHOOLS

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ESOL: A Challenge for Rural Schools

Rural school systems are being challenged more and more by the diversified needs of students. The potential for violence, the increase in ADD (Attention Deficient Disorder) students, inclusion for Special Education students, 504 regulations, etc....are all needs that contribute to a list that seems endless. One challenge that confronted our small rural system was the influx of limited and/or non English speaking students from two areas - the manufacturing (Japanese) and nursery (Hispanic) industries. To meet the needs created by this influx, the Warren County (Tennessee) School System created an ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) Program.

The ESOL Program began in 1987 with nine students and one teacher/administrator (the author). It quickly grew to nineteen students the following year and to thirty-one students in 1989. In 1989 a full-time ESOL teacher was added to the program. Numbers stabilized in the 1990-91 school year to approximately fifty students, and the system hired a Spanish/English bilingual assistant for the ESOL program. Although numbers have held constant since 1990, the percentage of native Spanish speakers in the program has increased to about fifty percent from less than twenty percent in the first year. The percentage of Japanese has decreased and stabilized at around fifty percent. Although the long term needs of these two populations can vary, there exist the immediate needs of raising their English ability to allow them to function in the classroom. (Needs vary in that the Hispanic will probably remain in the United States while the Japanese population rotates with a 3-5 year cycle. The Japanese student must be able to return to the Japanese school system. To assist them in that goal, students attend a Saturday Supplemental School, sponsored in part by regional Japanese businesses, in which Japanese language and mathematics are studied. There are also significant cultural and lifestyle differences that must be considered.)

Throughout the growth of non-native English speakers, Warren County's ESOL Program has continued to reflect a "Total Approach" involving students, parents, teachers, and community members interacting with the ESOL staff to meet student and family needs. These needs are met in a variety of ways. During the regular school day, students attend pull-out ESOL classes, and the ESOL staff works with the regular classroom teacher in communication, material development, and any other way necessary. Many other services are provided outside regular school hours: survival English classes for new arrivals, individual school orientations (often including color-coded maps and school tours), after-school tutorials and language development classes, a home intervention program, parent meetings, a two-week summer program, and acculturation classes.

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Parent involvement is a key proponent of the total approach with acculturation classes being a favorite of the students and their families. Besides explaining about the holidays and doing special activities, typical foods are often served. One example is the annual Thanksgiving Feast that is given for all ESOL families with the ESOL Department usually furnishing the turkey and dressing while classroom teachers of ESOL students bring the side dishes and desserts. The ESOL students and their families are honored guests. Recent numbers have grown to well over one hundred in attendance at the annual Thanksgiving Feast. Acculturation classes are also very important for the Japanese students and their families due to the differences in lifestyles and culture. The differences between the Mexican and American cultures are not as extreme so our Mexican-American students' needs are not as great in this area. Parents have also attended communication classes, and the local GED Program has an ESL class for Spanish speakers.

Another important part of parental involvement is parent meetings. These are usually held at the end of each month, and monthly calendars are distributed that reflect important school dates, holidays, and some community events. Topics of interest are also discussed, as when our system adopted a new AIDS curriculum or parent-teacher conferences (which we role-played). Due to transportation problems and the fact that parents of our Hispanic children usually work late, parent meetings have evolved to being attended by our Japanese mothers only (with translation services provided). In order to increase our contact with our Spanish-speaking population, a new program was created. "HIP", or Home Intervention Program, deals only with our Spanish-speaking students and their families. At least one evening a week, the ESOL teacher and the bilingual assistant make visits into the homes of some of the ESOL students.....basically for communication purposes. This has had a positive impact. Communications are better and "possible" problems have been averted. Teachers and parents have praised this program and the efforts of the ESOL staff.

Classroom teacher involvement in ESOL is also essential. The ESOL staff works with classroom teachers to assist in materials, homework tasks, and communication with parents. Their input at the year-end conferences, which determine the LEP (limited English proficient) student's educational program for the next school year, is vital. Workshops are conducted by local ESOL personnel, as well as outside consultants, to train teachers on how to meet the needs of these special students in their classrooms. Topics covered include teaching strategies, grading suggestions, problems that may occur, etc., in addition to promoting a better understanding of their students' cultures. Through the school year, various handouts on teaching LEP students, newsletters, and other notifications are distributed to keep the teachers informed and updated.

The fourth aspect of our "total approach" deals with the community. The ESOL Program Director has coordinated speakers and materials for teachers, civic organizations, and community groups. Parents have actively

participated in school fund-raisers. Some parents have gone into classrooms to teach origami (Japanese art of paper folding), about Japanese culture, and the Japanese language on a regular basis. The program has also sponsored Japanese events for schools and the community to increase knowledge and understanding. The most successful has been the Hina Doll Festival which included a display of hina dolls, Japanese items, ladies wearing kimonos, and Japanese snacks. In 1991, over five hundred students and many community members participated in the Hina Doll Festivities. The ESOL staff has also worked with local Spanish (foreign language) teachers in International Fairs and Open Houses to promote multicultural activities. The ESOL Director was instrumental in the research and organization of a Sister City Steering Committee and student exchange program with a sister city in Japan. Summer of 1994 saw the second group of Japanese exchange students visit here, the first group of our students to go to Japan, and the formal signing of a Sister City Agreement between McMinnville, Tennessee and Mikawa, Japan. Staff members have also distributed gifts to Hispanic children donated by Spanish Club students from our high school.

All four aspects (student participation, parent involvement, teacher input and assistance, and school and community activities) make a comprehensive or "total" approach to our LEP students' acquisition of English and understanding of a new culture. Our school system funds three ESOL staff members and a small materials budget through local funding. The use of extended contract money has allowed the development of after-school and summer programs. The results have been well worth the investments; students are better adjusted and begin working on grade-level faster. Clearer communications between parents and school personnel exist, allowing better understanding, less confusion, and less negative feelings. Our local Japanese industries (Calsonic-Yorozu Corporation and Bridgestone/Firestone USA) have welcomed and encouraged a better understanding between cultures by their support and contributions to school and community. Sending educators to Japan, supporting and backing the Sister City Program, including the student exchange, as well as their enthusiastic support of ESOL activities, are only a few ways their support can be observed.

School systems are required to meet the special needs of these students based on Supreme Court decisions and State rules and regulations. Warren County has gone a few steps beyond what is required, thanks to the support of the local school board, superintendent, school commissioners, teachers, and community members. Resources are available to rural systems through their State Departments of Education and professional organizations like TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages). TESOL works with all limited English proficient students for which English is not their native language. These do not have to be foreign born. Many ESOL teachers work with native Americans and migrant children who were born in the United States but are LEP. Most states have TESOL affiliates. There is also a southeast regional TESOL that covers ten states: Tennessee, Kentucky, North

Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Arkansas. These organizations sponsor state and regional conferences with resource people that can provide assistance. Help *is* available to meet this challenge for rural school systems, and the need for resources will continue to grow as numbers of LEP students continue to increase throughout rural America.

Dianna M. Zadeh is the 1994-95 President of Tennessee TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages), a member of the Tennessee Bilingual Education Steering Committee, Director of Warren County Tennessee's ESOL Program, a member of Kappa Delta Pi, a Career Level III teacher, and former State Evaluator for Tennessee's Career Ladder Program. She has been in education for twenty-four years, obtaining her B.S. and M.A. from Tennessee Technological University.